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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 005947

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DHAHRAN SENDS
PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2016

TAGS: [PGOVPHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAG REMOVES SHI'A JUDGE IN QATIF

REF: A. RIYADH 8

[B.](#) 2005 RIYADH 9396

[C.](#) 2005 RIYADH 9142

[D.](#) 2005 RIYADH 8582

Classified by Acting Consul General Dave Speidel for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (SBU) The SAG removed Ghalib Al-Hammad as judge of the Shi'a court in Qatif, replacing him with associate judge Sulaiman Abu Al-Makarem effective July 19. Al-Hammad had only held the post for 7 months (ref B), and his abrupt sacking engendered speculation and criticism within the Shi'a community. Rasid News Network, a Shi'a Internet forum that carried a short article on the replacement, said that the SAG removed Al-Hammad because he rejected the SAG's appointment of Abu Al-Makarem, whom Al-Hammad viewed as unqualified, as an associate judge. Our contacts had different reactions. One said characterized Abu Al-Makarem as "unqualified and a SAG lackey," suggesting that Prince Naif, the Minister of Interior was promoting Abu Al-Makarem as a way of keeping tabs on the Shi'a community. Another contact was indifferent, saying, "It doesn't really matter who the judge is. The government can replace him whenever they want, and he doesn't have real power." A third Shi'a contact, who is closer to the SAG, said that the Vice Emir of the Eastern Province (EP) had made the decision to remove Al-Hammad because he could not accept having a subordinate.

[12.](#) (C) Comment: The judicial system is a sore spot for Saudi Shi'a. They argue that Shi'a family courts are under-resourced and lack authority even over intra-Shi'a family matters (refs A and D). Just before Al-Hammad's appointment, Jafar Al-Shayeb, the most prominent local politician among the Shi'a, said that he hoped Al-Hammad would prove more effective at addressing these two issues than the incumbent, Abdullah Al-Khunaizi (ref C). It appears he was not: while the SAG apparently did appoint associate judges in both courts, it seems that it used the appointment in Qatif to assert more control over the court. We interpret the episode of Al-Hammad's replacement as a setback to Shi'a efforts to gain more autonomy over their own affairs. End comment.

(APPROVED: SPEIDEL)
OBERWETTER